NCO to join prestigious MMA academy

The story of Sergeant Nate Baker, and his journey from the streets to the ring

Jennifer Small Fort Stewart Public Affairs

Sergeant Nathaniel Baker has always been a fighter.

He overcame a tough childhood and the lure of the streets to join the Army and become a noncommissioned officer. He has overcome his size (5'5", 140 pounds) to become a world champion jujitsu fighter. Now, he faces possibly his biggest challenge of all - trying to become a full-time, professional mixed martial arts fighter.

Growing up on the rough streets of Dorchester, Mass., Sgt. Baker could have taken the easy way out and followed most of those around him to the likely place - prison. But instead, a year after graduating from high school, Sgt. Baker took his grandmother's advice and joined the

"I saw a lot of Family Members going to prison," Sgt. Baker said. "I came to the realization that I didn't want to wake up one day 30-something, just getting released from prison. I didn't want to end up like most of my Family."

Not that it was a short path for him to find his way to the Army. It took years of misbehaving, wasting talent (including a 1310 on his SAT, and a second-place finish in the Maine state high school wrestling championships), turning his back on college wrestling scholarships for drug and alcohol abuse before an event shook him enough to make a change.

"I thought I'd be dead by 20," he said. "And I didn't even care."

But one night changed the course of Nathaniel Baker's life.

He told the story of watching a homeless man get stabbed on the streets, but he continued to fight for his life.

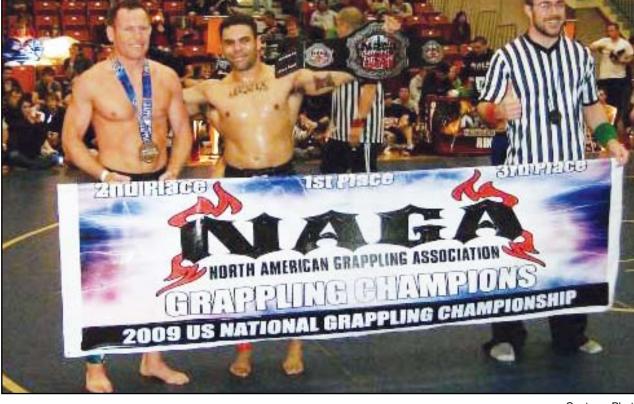
"I was drunk and high and thinking 'why is he fighting it? Why doesn't he just go peacefully?" Sgt. Baker remembers. "Then it hit me: if this bum values his life, and I have so much more than him, what am I doing? It was God slapping me in the face.'

Twelve years and two combat tours in Iraq later, a communications support specialist and combatives trainer with Headquarters and Headquarter Company, 3rd Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment, Sgt. Baker, now 33, is taking his life in a new direction - moving to New Mexico to train with some of the best MMA fighters in the world.

Many people say they want to become an Ultimate Fighting champion, but Sgt. Baker, a jujitsu brown belt, isn't one of the millions of men who fight for fun in their free time. He recently tried out for, and was accepted to join, Greg Jackson's Mixed Martial Arts in Albuquerque, N.M., one of the most prestigious MMA academies in the world, where he will train alongside the likes of UFC superstars Rashad Evans, George St. Pierre and Nate Marquardt.

It was during his second tour in Iraq in 2008 that Sgt. Baker decided to make a change in his life and follow his dream.

"My Soldier, Spc. James D. Gudridge, was killed," Sgt. Baker



Sergeant Nate Baker, HHC, 3/15 Inf., won the expert advanced 140-149.5 pound featherweight class at the North American Grappling Association Nationals, March 22, and the NAGA Tournament of Champions, April 18. Sergeant Baker has a 6-2 record as a professional mixed martial arts fighter.

said, fighting back tears. "He was only 19. He was the ideal Soldier. It made me come to the realization that I couldn't do this forever, losing people. So I prayed and God told me to go try out for the best MMA in the world and really, what did I have to lose?"

During his R&R, Sgt. Baker traveled from Iraq Albuquerque, and after an intense three-day tryout he got the good news.

"At the end (of the tryout) Rashad Evans came upstairs and told me, 'Buddy, all you have to do is come back from Iraq."

After his tryout in April 2008, Sgt. Baker returned to Iraq until December.

He has wasted no time since redeploying, winning two championships in the past two months. On March 22, Sgt. Baker won North American Grappling Association Nationals in Jonesboro, Ga., fighting in the expert advanced 140-149.5 pound featherweight class. On April 18, he won the Tournament of Champions in Orlando, Fla., which is a no-gi, jujitsu, submission tournament.

Sergeant Baker is getting out of the Army to improve as a MMA fighter full time. He will live and train at Jackson's gym with the other professional fighters. They train eight hours a day, and eat five times a day. The academy is strict, and the professional fighters who train there are paid.

The Army isn't the only thing that Sgt. Baker is giving up in pursuit of his dream. The father of two girls, Chloe, 8, and Maria, 6, will have to go without seeing his daughters every day. They are going to stay with Baker's mother in Dallas while he trains in Albuquerque.

"You have to sacrifice things in life," Sgt. Baker said. "During my time in the Army, I've been away from them, but this is something I feel like I have to do... I only have a few years (to become a world-class MMA fighter). I just look forward to flying out to Dallas most weekends."

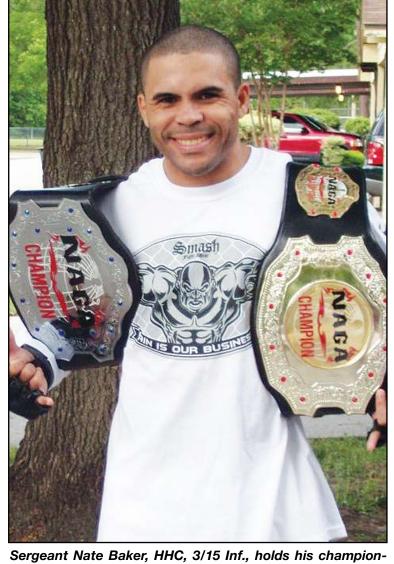
Because of his smaller stature, you'll never see Sgt. Baker in the UFC, but he has other lofty expectations, including becoming the World Extreme Cagefighting Champion, where they have the featherweight class. At Jackson's school, Baker will train with Demacio Page and Leonard Garcia, two of the best featherweight MMA fighters in the world.

"The Army discipline has

helped me," Sgt. Baker said. "I know how to be a leader... as an NCO, having to lead Soldiers. You aren't born a leader; the Army makes you one. The Army gives you ambition and the drive to be better. I've been blessed as a Soldier."

Despite leaving his ACUs and combat boots behind, Sgt. Baker said that the Army will always be close to his heart.

"God helps those who help themselves, but I had the help of my A Co. brothers," Sgt. Baker said, thanking his command at HHC, 3/15 Inf. "I'll always support the Army."



ship belts from the North American Grappling Association Nationals, March 22, and the NAGA Tournament of Champions, April 18.



Greg Jackson's Mixed Martial Arts, one of the premier MMA schools in the world, where he will live and train alongside some of the best fighters in the world, including 10 world champions.

Bob Mathews

FMWR Marketing Publicity Specialist

Do you have what it takes to be one of 24 team members who will represent the 3rd Infantry Division in the 25th edition of the Army Ten-Miler in Washington, D.C., this fall?

Find out June 27.

On that day, 3rd ID will hold its Ten-Miler qualifying race. The gun will go off at 5 a.m. at the onemile Donovan Field Track in the National Guard Training Area of Fort Stewart.

3rd ID to qualify its best for Army Ten-Miler, June 27

The top six runners in each of four groups will represent 3rd ID: men's open; women's open, and

men's and women's masters (age 40 and older). The qualifying competition is for active duty Soldiers only. There is no charge.

To register or to learn more details about the qualifier, visit Bennett's Sports Complex, building 471, Monday-Friday, or call 767-8238.

This year, the Army Ten-Miler will celebrate its 25th anniversary. The race is scheduled for 8 a.m., Oct. 4. The race will start and finish at the Pentagon with a course that will take runners by the Capitol, Lincoln Memorial, Washington Monument and

other D.C. landmarks. Each year, tens of thousands of runners and spectators descend upon Washington, D.C., to join in the prestigious event. The Army Ten-Miler proceeds benefit Army Morale, Welfare and Recreation.

For complete information about the Army Ten-

Miler, go to www.armytenmiler.com/index.cfm. The Army Ten-Miler training page, which includes recipes, is at www.armytenmiler.com/ Raceinfo/Training.cfm.

Jake's Body Shop: Fighting the effects of age

Jake Battle

DMWR Fitness Director

Until recently, most thought it was normal to lose strength with age. Once-firm muscles become soft, bones grow brittle and energy decreases. Now we know that much of the aging process is caused by a lack of exercise. You can slow several of the effects of age by exercising.

Strength training

Strength training provides additional benefits. Resistance exercises that improve strength also improve bone density. People who conduct aerobic exercises and weight training have greater bone density than those who perform only aerobic exercises. This is especially important for menopausal women since they lose bone mineral faster than men.

Weight Training

Weight training for aging adults must be moderate since lifting heavyweights is not recommended. Some specialists say you can get enough muscular work by doing calisthenics such as sit-ups, push-ups and pull-ups; beware though, since too many pull-ups may increase blood pressure. Equipment that

use a mechanical cam that varies resistance in proportion to your muscular strength are recommended since the machines are very safe and work with almost every important muscle.

Stretching

As you age, the connective tissues in your joints, ligaments and tendons shorten and stiffen. Tightness in your leg muscles and Achilles tendons, and weak stomach muscles, can cause back problems.

Stretching lengthens these tissues and restores their flexibility. Stretching for ten

minutes a day can help prevent injury.

Warm-up by walking for a few minutes. Never bounce while stretching, and don't stretch to the point where you feel pain. This could tear the tissues you were trying to protect. Instead, slowly stretch until you feel a slight pull. Hold the stretch for 30 seconds, but release before that if it hurts.

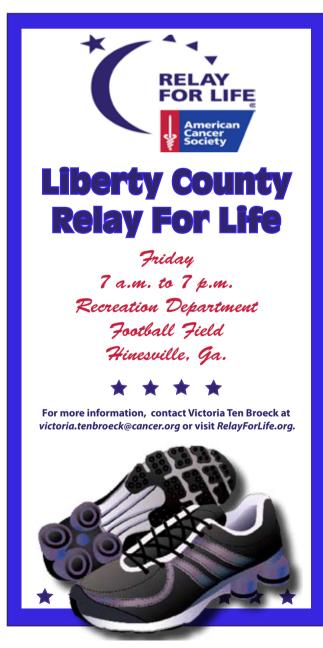
Exercise can be difficult to maintain, but even just a little physical activity each day will add healthy benefits to your life.

This article is not intended to provide individual advice, which should be obtained directly from your health care professional.



Spc Michael Adams

Chief Warrant Officer Eddie Hernandez, legal administrator for the 3rd Infantry Division, strikes his ball over a sand trap during the Staff Judge Advocate's 2009 Law Day Golf Tournament at Fort Stewart's Taylors Creek Golf Course, May 1. The tournament was held at the end of a week that celebrated Law Day, observed on May 1. Law Day was created "for the cultivation of the respect for law that is so vital to the democratic way of life," as stated by the Presidential proclamation signed by Dwight D. Eisenhower. A story on the events leading up to Law Day appears in this edition of The Frontline in section A.



Last week made it hard not to watch

Sports Commentary
Sgt. Joseph McAtee
3rd Infantry Division Public Affairs

After the last couple of weeks, I wonder why some people don't find sports interesting.

I know I'm not the only Soldier who stretched my evenings well into hours I'm normally sleeping to watch the drama of the Celtics-Bulls first round matchup. It was as good as basketball gets. The series opened with the dramatic exclusion of Kevin Garnett, forced to watch his teammates struggle against the 7th seeded Bulls. It continued with the physicality of a football game that climaxed when Rajon Rondo performed dental surgery on Brad Miller with his elbow. The home crowd propelled the Celtics to a game 7 series-clinching victory, but I'd be surprised if they maintain any momentum moving forward. With Garnett and his fist-sized diamonds on the sidelines, the defending champions limp into the second round against the Orlando Magic and man-beast Dwight Howard. Nevertheless, the theater on display in Boston and Chicago that fed basketball fans seven overtimes in a single series won't be matched any time soon.

Meanwhile, the Kentucky Derby reminded most of the world of horse racing's existence and defended the nickname of "the greatest two minutes in

sports." I would be hard-pressed to suggest the race was anything but great. Like Garnett in the Celtics-Bulls series, the most dominant athlete in the Derby was forced to sit out. Early morning favorite I Want Revenge woke up with a blister on his ankle and was unable to run in the most important race of his life. With Revenge out of the way, the field opened up for the most unlikely of horses, Mine that Bird, to run away with the roses. In the second biggest upset in Derby history, Bird tore through the smallest of holes down the stretch in the 135th Kentucky Derby and ran away in convincing fashion. Speaking of fashion, the hats at the Derby could be its own reality show. Any time a hat outweighs the woman whose head it rests upon, I laugh, and I laughed pretty often on Saturday.

I had a chance to calm down Saturday afternoon only to get amped up again when Manny Pacquiao approached the ring that night to face Ricky Hatton in a junior welterweight title fight that had the feel of a heavyweight showdown. I have to admit my bias here that I am an unabashed Pacquiao fan, but how anybody could watch that fight and not be excited by the sheer talent in that little man's body is beyond me. His speed and precision are arguably unrivaled in the history of boxing. Watching him, it's hard to believe what you're seeing; he fights like Neo from the Matrix.

All this came just a week after the NFL Draft, the fountain of hope for every losing football franchise. The Detroit Lions might have broken the record books by being the first team to go 0-16, but they were number 1 at Radio City Music Hall. The Draft is more than an expo to highlight the eager rookies who make the trip to New York. It's about the rabid fans who boo every pick their team makes. It's about pundits scrambling to explain the insanity of Oakland Raiders owner Al Davis. It's about Mel Kiper's hair. It's a great event.

But my favorite sporting event, which has been played out over the last 10 months: the UEFA Champions League. I know soccer fans are few and far between in the States, but I don't love the game for its stateside popularity. Maybe that's why my favorite American sport is baseball.

Baseball is the American pastime. It is the game of summer. It is long, slow and exhausting. And it's great. For all the theatrics of the Celtics-Bulls series, depsite the tremendous upset at Churchill Downs, in the face of Manny Pacquiao's lightning-filled gloves and the NFL Draft and Champions League aside, I'd rather miss them all to watch the Texas Rangers beat the New York Yankees in a day game on a Saturday. It doesn't make sense but then again, sometimes being a sports fan doesn't make sense to anyone but yourself.



